

## Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

*Over the years, I've found my life changing and my faith deepening as I meet with our heavenly Father in His word. This has been especially true as I've been writing these devotionals and having to live what I write.*

*I long for you to be able to say the same as you read through Matthew's perspective of Jesus as he wrote in his Gospel.*

*As I've gotten to know Matthew, I'm overwhelmed by how he was changed by knowing and walking with his Lord and how much he must have longed for us to know Jesus as he did.*

*These last eight chapters of Matthew follow Jesus during His last week of life on earth. Please take your time working through each section, and ask the Father how He wants you to respond to what you're seeing and learning.*

*Blessings on your time as we continue this walk with the Father,*

Margie Martin



Israel in Jesus' Time

# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 21:1-11

*"Say to the Daughter of Zion, See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."*

As we start reading through the last chapters in Matthew that cover the last week of Jesus' life, I wanted to remember where we had left off with Matthew, so I looked back and saw Jesus again predicting His death, saw the disciples (who had been watching Him and heard Him teaching) argue over who was going to be the greatest in the kingdom, and then saw blind men who really saw Him for who He was and received their sight. Those who could see were blind to truth and those who were blind could truly see. Interesting to think about which group we belong to today.

So many questions come to mind as I read today's section:

- Why start in Bethphage, and where is it?
- How did Jesus know about the donkey and her colt?
- Why a colt and not the larger and stronger donkey?
- Did Jesus know about Zechariah's prediction? (Zechariah 9:9)
- Why did Matthew leave out one line from Zechariah: "righteous and having salvation"?
- Where did the crowd come from since they weren't from the city?

Some of these questions I'll leave to you, but I did find out that Bethphage (mentioned in three of the Gospel accounts) was the farthest from Jerusalem that a person could walk on the Sabbath (900 meters) and not break the law that the Pharisees had established.

John tells us in his Gospel that the crowd had just seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead outside of Bethany and were probably part of those who had come to Jerusalem for Passover. The crowd followed Jesus from Bethany to Bethphage and then onto Jerusalem.

Now why a colt, why include the word "gentle," but not "righteous and having salvation" from Zechariah? I think Jesus knew that we need a gentle savior who has earned the right to be called righteous and to offer salvation. To do this He would need to humble Himself – put off all that He is – so His death could satisfy His Father's judgment of sin and its horrible results in our lives.

Jesus humbled Himself and *endured* the cross and then was brought back to new life on the third day because God's judgment of sin was satisfied.

How do the words "humility" and "gentleness" strike you today? Do you fight against them? I sure do. Tomorrow we'll see that they don't mean inaction or being passive but rather great strength, a different kind of strength.

Your King comes to you in humility and with gentle strength. *How are you going to respond to Him today? How can we refuse?*

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 21:12-17

"It is written, 'he said to them, 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'"

Years ago, a friend who was helping me learn how to understand the scriptures said to always look at the contrasts. As I've done this, I've seen that God has always clearly shown me the options I have – and that there's never been a middle ground.

So today Jesus is setting a choice in front of us. Let's see what He's saying.

### Those who come to Jesus

### Those who resist Jesus

❖ Honor Jesus (previous section)	❖ See Jesus' angry side making a mess in their lives
❖ Connect with God in peace and safety	❖ Take advantage of others
❖ Are healed	❖ Dismiss what is done for those in need
❖ Children love Him	❖ Indigent over children's words
❖ Bask in His presence and love	❖ See His back as He leaves them

I am amazed at how easily Jesus emotionally shifts between the religious leaders and the blind and lame. Obviously, He's not overcome by His seeming anger as He overturns tables and benches. When I'm angry, it takes me a while to calm down (you too?). His anger is controlled and purposeful. He had been in the temple many times before and would have seen what was happening, but this occurrence was one of His last times to operate freely in the temple, so it was the time to engage the Pharisees and give them the opportunity to see what they were really doing and how far they were from what God wanted for them. He made their choice absolutely clear.

Do you feel like you're seeing God's angry side these days? Are you taking advantage of others for your own benefit? Do you see yourself often being indigent over other's good fortune or children's sense of freedom and honesty? Do you feel like you're seeing Jesus' back instead of His loving face? Then Jesus is giving you the opportunity to own up to what you're doing, humble yourself, and turn to Him.

The choice is clear; it's up to us to choose whether to come or to resist. And *coming* is just the first step. He doesn't promise an easy life as we see His last week on earth developing, but He does promise His life and love and healing. *What do you choose today?*

Jesus leaves Jerusalem and walks past Bethphage to Bethany with His disciples to spend the night.

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 21:18-22

*"If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."*

What a promise Jesus gives His disciples on this early morning walk back to Jerusalem! But we know there has to be more behind these 12 words. Just like there has to be more behind the incident of Jesus withering the fig tree when it didn't have the food He expected when He was hungry. After all, this happened during the last week of His life just after He had cleaned the temple of the money changers and the crowds, and the children had shouted hosanna to His name.

So, I did some reading and found some amazing information that brings light to this section:

1. Bethphage means "house of unripe figs" in Hebrew.
2. The fig tree is mentioned over 50 times in scripture.
3. The fig tree represented the spiritual health of Israel in the Old Testament – prosperity in 1 Kings 4:26 and judgement in Jeremiah 5:17.
4. Fig tree leaves were used by Adam and Eve to hide their nakedness (Genesis 3:7).
5. Fruit of the fig tree was often eaten by the poor.
6. Fig trees were a gift from God when Israel went into the land with Joshua (Deuteronomy 8:8, numbers 13:23).
7. Fig trees are the last tree in Israel to produce leaves so Jesus used it as a sign of the end of the age (Matthew 24:32, Mark 13:28).
8. Fig trees produce fruit before the leaves come out so Jesus would have expected fruit to eat when He saw the large leaves from a distance, even though it was early for the fruit to grow.

It's #7 that caught my attention. The leaves on the fig tree made it look like it was healthy and living, but it had no fruit and so was worthless. Likewise the temple system and the religious leaders in Israel: they "looked" good and were going through the right religious motions, but they had no life. So as Jesus judges the fig tree and cursed it, He was also pronouncing His coming judgement of Israel and demonstrating His power to carry out this judgment.

For them and for us, Jesus wants genuine salvation that shows itself in spiritual fruit that Paul described as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" [control of self] in Galatians 5:22-23 that is evident in our words and relationships. Jesus says if we're grafted onto the true vine (Himself), we'll bear "much fruit" and the fruit will remain (John 15:5-8). Our characters will so change that we'll begin to look like Him. Paul says that all 9 attributes are the fruit (result) of genuine salvation.

This is the kind of belief Jesus is referring to in today's verse when He says we "will receive whatever we ask for in prayer." *Are you this type of believer?* I think both you and I have a lot of clean up to do to be able to say "Yes!" I know I do.

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 21:23-27

*"I will also ask you one question."*

I've been thinking over the past couple of days about when Jesus asks that one question or makes that one statement to someone – the question or statement that stops a person in his or her tracks. Here are some questions and statements that challenge us:

- "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Matthew 4:19
- "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead." Matthew 8:22
- "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Matthew 8:26
- "Get up, take up your mat and go home." Matthew 9:6
- "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" Matthew 16:15
- "If you [rich young man] want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." Matthew 19:21

And these examples are just from Matthew. As a woman, Jesus' statement to Martha in Luke 10:41-42 always stops me in my tracks: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

But in all of these questions and statements by Jesus that we've just looked at, the real issue is, how do His listeners (and we) respond? Do they walk away, rationalize their behavior, ignore Him, or own up to where they are in life and start going in a new direction?

In some cases, we know the outcome: the disciples follow Him, the man picks up his mat and goes home, and Peter confesses who Jesus really is. In Martha's case, when she's grieving but hears that Jesus is coming, she goes to Him and Jesus gives her amazing insights about resurrection, but Mary stays home in her grief. Even when Mary comes to Him at Martha's urging, all she can do is cry at His feet and blame Jesus for not coming earlier and saving her brother. But their story isn't over at this moment of grief. Interested? See John 12:1-11.

The thought that came to me as I read today's section is, what question or statement does Jesus want to ask me, and how will I respond? I know I'll refuse to answer as the chief priests and elders of the people did because I know what the outcomes would be, and I don't want those.

Tomorrow is my birthday, and every year that I've been writing He's given me an amazing look at His heart, so today I asked him what questions He had for me, and 3 popped into my mind immediately. Tears came to my eyes, and my heart broke as I faced what He was asking of me. I could respond by faith and choice, but my emotions aren't there yet.

*How about you? What question or statement is Jesus saying to you? Don't know? Why don't you ask Him. Remember, our response is what's important. It may take a while for our responses to be as we want them to be as we count the cost, but the choice we make determines our future.*

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 21:28-32

*"For John came to you [chief priests and elders] to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him."*

In the last section, Jesus asked these men a tough question, because either answer wouldn't be good for them. After discussing it from all sides, they gave the answer that my grandkids often use, "We don't know." So, Jesus began to lay out the foundation of His authority. They'll still have to answer His question, or at least respond to what He's saying, but Jesus is willing to give them all the information they'll need.

What about you – did Jesus have a question or statement for you after you read the previous section? I hope you didn't miss this opportunity. It's taken me almost a year to seriously consider His questions to me. I had to look at my resistance to answering, why I have such needs for close friends, the lack of forgiveness and subsequent emotional barriers I've raised that's kept me from friendships, and the resentment I've felt toward God for what He allowed to happen in my life. So much was in me that I never knew, but now I do. What I ended up doing yesterday as I faced "my questions" was remind myself that my heavenly Father was already reaching out to me in my areas of need. I just wasn't taking Him up on what He was offering.

So, what is Jesus saying about His authority in today's parable about a father and his two sons? All sons (and daughters) want to be in charge of their own lives, even though the fathers are supporting them financially and providing them with a place to live and food to eat. Every father wants a hardworking and grateful son and daughter. Fathers want to trust what their adult children tell them. If a son or daughter tells him what he wants to hear without following through, the father feels lied to and trust is broken. But if a son or daughter initially says "no" but then humbles him- or herself and then does what had been asked, the father has hope for the kind of person his offspring is becoming.

God used John's baptism to give these Jewish leaders a chance to respond to Him, but they didn't repent, even after seeing the least in the nation – tax collectors and prostitutes – respond to the way of righteousness.

*How are you responding to John's call to the way of righteousness?* I hope you're not saying the right words and thinking that's good enough. Jesus shows us that honesty and humility are the first steps we need to take to be like the second son.

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 21:33-46

*"Therefore, I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."*

When you take the time to watch TV or choose a movie to watch, what genre do you gravitate toward? Do you like mysteries, reality, romance, relationships, sci-fi? I tend to choose stories of a man or woman who stands up to those who are corrupt and take advantage of average people and then bring them to justice by the strength of their character and their ability to outthink those who they're standing up to.

That's probably why I love today's parable. The tenants may have been able to kill servants and a son, but they won't be able to be left standing when the owner of the vineyard comes and puts all things right. I love when good prevails and the bad guys either get what they deserve or own up to what they've done and change 180°. Good prevailing at the end of a story gives me hope when all I can see is bad.

When the chief priests and elders realized that Jesus was equating them to the tenants, they had a choice: humble themselves and acknowledge that they weren't honoring the God they professed to represent or look for a way to get rid of the messenger – His Son. But as powerful as they were in the nation of Israel, they were more afraid of the masses turning on them and losing what they had. Amazing that they were more afraid of the people than they were of God and what He said would happen. Their immediate circumstances were more important to them than the eventual outcome.

Have you ever had God put His finger on an issue in your life — over and over? Maybe it's how you spend money, your work ethic, honesty, how you spend your time, an addiction, or a way of thinking. For me it's what I eat. From early childhood, I've loved sweets in any form. When I heard as a young Christian that women struggle with food the way men struggle with sex, I had to accept that if God was really going to be in charge of my life so I could be free of the chains of sin and sin patterns, I was going to have to give up this control that sugar had over me in any form, including alcohol and bread. This change hasn't happened over night; it's been an ongoing process of learning to choose over decades. Even now I'm facing some new issues with food and am having to figure out what's reacting with my body and that I'll have to give up eating.

It's hard to live with limitations of any kind. *What are you facing these days?* Our choice, like the chief priests and elders, is whether we're going to live for today or for eternity. If eternity, then we'll see kingdom fruit being produced of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5). *What are you seeing today: bondage or fruit?*

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 22:1-14

*"Friend," he said, "how did you get in here without wedding clothes?" The man was speechless."*

Jesus continues His answer to the chief priests and elders of why He had the authority after He cleared out the temple and overturned their lives and who gave this authority to Him. After the parable in the last section, they looked for a way to arrest Him. After today's parable, they look for a way to trap Him in His words the way He had trapped them about John's baptism (21:24-25).

I think the meaning behind this parable is pretty clear – until Jesus gets to the man who wasn't wearing the right wedding clothes, and the king tells the attendants to throw him out. The right wedding clothes? What is different between this man and all the others who had come in off the street, those who were good and bad?

So, I started reading online about this section and found some interesting information about Jewish wedding customs in the 1st century. First, I learned that the wedding celebration could go on for a full week. It was a big deal, unlike today when a wedding and reception can be over in a few hours.

Second, I learned that in the 1<sup>st</sup> century the father picked up all the expenses for the wedding celebration, including a wedding garment for all guests that would go over their own clothes.

Now the scene and the parable make sense, and we can understand the king's anger. He's gone out of his way to honor his son, but those who should have respected and honored the groom because they respected and honored his father have shown their true colors. The father then opened his doors to whole new groups of people – Gentiles – and they responded as any man or woman should. Except for one man. Why would he refuse to put on a wedding garment? I'm thinking it's due to a lack of respect, honor, and humility. He wanted to do things his way and not submit himself to any authority. But look where it got him.

I bet the chief priests and elders clearly saw themselves in Jesus' parable, but because they didn't really respect or honor the Father, and because they refused to humble themselves, they chose to trap Jesus so they could put Him in His place (v. 15 in next section).

*Do these three character traits – respect, honor, humility – reflect how we come to God and so live life? Or are we all wound up in ourselves?*

Today is two days away from my birthday, and today's section is the Father's gift to me of how He wants me to approach the next year. We all have this invitation, but we must accept it dressed in the clothes of righteousness He's provided through His son. *Want to join me?*

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 22:15-22

*"But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said . . . ."*

We're in the middle of a contentious presidential election with three months to go, but I see so many comparisons with the interaction between the religious leaders and Jesus. I'm certainly not equating either of the candidates with Jesus but am just looking at the exchanges. Let's see what we have.

We started with the challenge to Jesus' authority since He wasn't one of them. When Jesus asked them a question about John, they knew they were stumped, and so the challenge began. He told them parables that put them in a bad light if they held onto their position, so what do they do: agree with Him or go on the attack? Their attack is what I find interesting.

Today's attack starts with the Pharisees having a strategy meeting to figure out a way to trap Jesus in His own words. Sounds like a good strategy since these men knew the scriptures inside and out, they were educated, and they had tradition behind them. They decided not to get their own hands dirty, so they sent their disciples along with some Jewish men who were backing King Herod (remember the man who had John beheaded?).

This "second string" of leaders first buttered up Jesus by acknowledging His integrity and the validity of His teaching. Their third comment is a little strange, though, when they say that He isn't swayed by men's words because He doesn't *pay attention to who they are*. What? If anyone pays attention to who people really are, it's Jesus. It's as though they want to put a wedge between Jesus and those He loves and came to save.

Then they asked the question that the Pharisees know will trap Jesus: should the people pay taxes to Caesar? If Jesus says "yes," He upsets the people; if He says "no," He's breaking Roman law and could be arrested.

"But Jesus." The two most wonderful words we can ever hear. These two words can change everything.

Jesus isn't trapped, however, because He knows what they're really trying to do and can put the issue into an eternal perspective. In this case, we pay earthly taxes, but what we owe God is our heart, our trust, and our lives.

These men were amazed at His words but didn't know what to say in response, so they walked away. *But what are we going to do? What is the situation in your life that seems to overwhelm you today?* Last night I told my husband about my situation, and this morning he told me his. We both need to go to Jesus and tell Him what is overwhelming us to Him. He can sort through our motives, intent, and fears and give us His eternal perspective. We need "but Jesus" today. *How about you?*

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 22:23-33

*"He is not the God of the dead but of the living."*

Now another group of religious leaders come at Jesus with a different issue that they know will trap Him: resurrection, which they don't even believe in. You just have to know that they've been honing their argument for years since other groups would have been attacking them on this issue.

Jesus challenges them on their knowledge of the scriptures and their lack of understanding of the power of God.

While I quickly admit that I don't know the Old Testament well enough to understand the teaching about resurrection that Jesus says they should have known, I do know two things. One, resurrection is not a major theme in the Old Testament like it is in the New Testament, so I could understand their lack of knowledge, but Jesus thought they should have known this truth since they were educated men. If King David knew that he wouldn't experience decay (Psalm 16:10), and Isaiah knew that the dead will live and their bodies will rise (Isaiah 26:19), and Daniel was told that at the end of time all who are dead will awake – some to everlasting life and others to shame and contempt (Daniel 12:1-3), then the Sadducees had no excuse.

Two, the Sadducees also didn't know the power of God. What David, Isaiah, and Daniel knew was that what was to come was nothing like what we have now. Now we need marriage so we can understand the love relationship God offers us, as well as the safety and protection marriage provides for women and children. At the resurrection we will know God for who He is, and we will be safe in His kingdom, so we don't need marriage.

On earth we have burial or cremation that follows death. But God said to Moses at the burning bush that didn't burn, "I Am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Moses knew way back then that if these men weren't still dead, then they were alive with God and that he too would have life after death – a miracle that has no equal.

Jesus again turned the question upside down and forced His listeners to rethink their assumptions. I think the Sadducees walked away embarrassed, angry, and ready to partner with the Pharisees in killing Jesus. The crowds were astonished, but we know they soon turned on Jesus too.

How is your knowledge of the scriptures or your understanding of the power of God? It's easy to be like the crowd who are amazed at the moment but then go their own way. Jesus wants so much more for us. I had to learn about Isaiah's and Daniel's words about resurrection for today, and I know I don't always live with a deep understanding of the power of God. But after today I know I don't have any excuses; I just have to keep the blinders on and keep remembering what God has said and done and not get sidetracked. *How about you?*

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 22:34-40

*"All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

Now that the second string of the religious right and the Sadducees have taken their best shots at Jesus and walked away silenced, the religious lawyers, the Pharisees, decide to take Him on themselves. One of their experts in the law asked Him the question that they knew would stump anyone. They want Him to single out the most important of the hundreds of commandments. They probably had debated this question themselves and hadn't come up with an answer.

But Jesus – those wonderful words – synthesized all the Law as well as all the truth in the Prophets into two easy-to-remember commandments. These two commandments cover our relationship with God, with each other, and how we think about ourselves. Brilliant. And with our relationship with God, Jesus frames how we think about God by telling us to love Him with everything we have. He's approachable and safe.

This synthesizing and simplifying reminds me of my early years with Jesus when I was in my 20's. I was being taught about walking by faith, the New Covenant, spiritual warfare, and spiritual gifts. I was overwhelmed by all the details, as well as by all the commands I was seeing in scripture. So I started asking those I trusted spiritually what I was to remember and concentrate on. I don't remember who gave me my answer, but my solution was to keep looking at Jesus. And when I focused my eyes on Him, I calmed down and was at peace. I figured that everything else would work itself out, and it has.

*Which of today's challenges are you facing?* Is it loving God with everything and with your whole being? Is it loving your neighbor? Is it loving yourself? Is it learning to look at Jesus and keep looking at Him?

For me, today? I think it's looking at Jesus. I'm starting to take on a major lifestyle change (retirement) and some painful and irritating physical challenges. These changes and challenges have been stealing my focus. Today's section has put life back into perspective.

*How about you?*

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 22:41-46

*“What do you think about . . . ? How is it then that . . . ?*

This week I'm hearing two different approaches from fellow Christians who are interacting with those turning their backs on the truth and grace of the gospel. One person is seeing the neighbor as the enemy and is fighting mad. The other is seeking to understand the thinking of those who are enmeshed in atheism and is wanting to see the ramifications of this thinking while speaking respectfully to those who have different opinions.

Jesus' questions to the Pharisees make me think of this second approach, even though in the next chapter we'll see Him taking a different tone and why He does so.

So how is it that you talk to and interact with those who disagree with you? What is the basis of your thinking and behavior in this type of situation? The circumstance may be religious, political, work, parents, or siblings.

I must admit that while I know how I probably should be and want to be, I rarely live according to these desires and can quickly see the havoc I create. *How about you? Do you write people off whose thinking and behavior bother you? So easy to do.*

I think that Jesus wanted to win over His opponents, as well as those around Him who were on the fence. How could He stay so steady in the face of constant challenges? Let's think through some possibilities.

1. Jesus knew who He was.
2. Jesus knew why He was where He was.
3. Jesus knew who the enemy was and his tactics.
4. Jesus knew what the final outcome was going to be.
5. Jesus chose to come to, live among, and die for us because He loves us and calls us to be His friends and His family.

Perhaps this is the thinking we need to do on a regular basis so we're ready for what comes at us. What do you think?

Jesus was ready, and He respectfully asked the Pharisees two questions they couldn't answer; they were silenced and no longer tried to ask Him questions to trap Him. *How can you get ready?*

Today was all about what people think; starting with the next section, we'll look at their behavior.

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 23:1-39

*"Woe to you . . . ."*

I've been thinking about this section for about a month, wondering how to approach it since it's so long, has no natural breaks in it, and basically says the same thing in different ways. Finally, I realized that the main idea is the main point, and I shouldn't get caught up in the details because they drive home the main point.

Jesus has just answered the questions that the three different groups of religious leaders challenged Him with, so their appearances, words, and lifestyles were fresh in His mind. He turned to the crowd and His disciples and gave them His warnings. He knew that it would be easy for them to be impressed by the religious leaders' power, wealth, prestige, education, ability to speak well, and grand clothing. It's easy to want the trappings that others have, but Jesus' words in this long section bring them back to reality. Do you tend to put your religious leaders on a pedestal? They can sound so good and look so polished, but what is the condition of their hearts? Do they exalt themselves or humble themselves to be your servants?

So, Jesus says, "Woe to them." For years I've thought that Jesus was being critical of these men, but that wasn't sitting right with me. I looked up "woe" in the dictionary, and it means "an exclamation of grief, distress, or lamentation." Now this fits into the picture of Jesus we've been getting from Matthew. Jesus' heart is breaking over the spiritual condition of these men, and it's like He's trying to shock His listeners into reality by telling whoever will listen what the results in life are when we live the way the religious leaders are living.

My prayer for myself is that Jesus would reveal to me any tendency I have to be a hypocrite – to talk a good game but have a heart that's critical, judgmental, or full of myself. How about you? What do you see in this section that is a warning to you?

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 24:1-3

*"I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down."*

Even though these three verses aren't really a "section," I had such a reaction to them that I wanted to concentrate on them for today.

Of all the times Jesus and His disciples have been at the temple, this instance is when they call His attention to the buildings. I'm sure they were amazing and huge, but why comment on them today? Sure, Jesus had referenced the temple in the 7 woes we just looked at, but was that enough for them to actually see the buildings? Maybe.

Regardless of the reason behind their observation, Jesus took the opportunity to tell them about what was to come. No stone would be left on top of another, and the largest of these stones weighed over 400 tons! History tells us that in 70 A.D. when the Roman army smashed what they saw as the Jewish rebellion, they tore down the temple stone by stone, and burned everything to get to whatever gold had melted between the stones.

The disciples must have been shocked by what Jesus said. Their beloved temple—the center of their worship and religious life—destroyed? Of anything Jesus had ever said, this prophesy rocked their world.

Have you ever been going in one direction and suddenly someone said or did something that changed everything? I'm thinking back on some of those times for me.

Now the disciples could have ignored Jesus' statement, thinking that He was just talking like He did about the kingdom of God. But they didn't ignore Him; they pursued the issue and asked "when" and "how will we know." This prophesy would affect them personally and they wanted more information.

I think their response is how God wants us to respond any time He gives us insight and not just when we're affected personally. He wants us to take Him seriously.

Has God given you an insight recently that you may want to ignore but He wants you to take seriously? He has for me, and writing today is my response, even though I really wanted to start reading a new book. If I had given into my emotions and taken the easy route, I would have missed out on today's message to us. What a shame that would have been.

What is God wanting you to do today that you are trying to ignore?

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 24:4-35

*" . . . but see to it that you are not alarmed . . . but he who stands firm to the end will be saved . . . but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened . . . See, I have told you ahead of time . . . And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other . . . Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."*

How did you react to today's passage? Kinda scared me, but as I reread these words, I was struck by the hope that Jesus kept including. I know we've all known about wars and rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes, and persecution through the media, but none of these events have happened in my small part of the world. However, as I try to imagine how I would respond if they came to my neighborhood, I could understand the fear that would cause believers to turn away from the faith, Jesus warning that turning from the faith leads to betrayal, hatred, and love growing cold made me see the seriousness of this fear. I know I need to stand firm, but I can feel myself shaking in my boots. You too?

Then Jesus talks about how fast the world can change when Daniel's prophesy is fulfilled. Believers will have to get to a safe place as fast as they can. If they're not ready to run, they will be caught up in a "great distress." False prophets will try to trick us to go here or there to see Jesus and be safe.

How can we not give into fear and try to protect ourselves? I think the only way we can make it through to the end is to remember Jesus' words that heaven and earth will pass away but His words—His truth—will remain. We've seen before that the antidote to fear is faith, faith in Jesus who has defeated sin and death. If He says that He is coming back to earth with power and great glory and will gather all of those who have believed until the end of their lives, He will. Evil won't last, but Jesus and those who belong to Him will.

What's going on in your world today? Are you going to stand firm or give into fear? Jesus gives us the consequences of both choices, so we'll make an informed decision. Let's not let the pressure of today take us down a path that leads to destruction.

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 24:36-51

*"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father!"*

In the 1970s when I became a Christian, the end times was a much discussed and written about topic. Then the *Left Behind* series was published in 1995, and I, for one, was fascinated with how the authors understood and could describe how the truth in Revelations could play out today. Every time I read something in the series and thought "that couldn't be," I'd open my Bible and find it. My pastor in California, Ray Stedman, when asked about the end times would tell us that every generation thought that events were so bad in their times that they were signaling Jesus' return to earth. Ray's book, *What on Earth Is Happening?*, covered this section in Matthew's Gospel.

Have you thought about this topic? Is it important in how you live your life as a Christian? My Aunt Leah and Uncle Ernie had a banner in their farm dining room where they ate every meal that read.

"Are you where you want to be when Jesus returns?  
Are you doing what you want to be doing when Jesus returns?  
Are you saying what you want to be saying when Jesus returns?"

If even Jesus didn't know when He would be returning to earth to collect His followers and put all things right, shouldn't we be living now with this end in sight? I don't think it means that we should live in fear, but rather we should live as Jesus asks us to so we will be ready.

I loved the series "Downton Abbey" on PBS because Mrs. Hughes and Mr. Carson, who were in charge of all of the downstairs staff, ran the home as if they owned it; they truly were servants who were doing their jobs regardless of who was around.

Is Jesus your "boss" at work, at home, and at play as Paul tells us He is to be in Ephesians 6:7-8? Once I decided to report to Jesus for how I did my job, all the pressure of the unknown went away since Jesus knows the future and is ultimately in charge of what happens. My annual raises were from Him since He knew what I needed, and my performance reviews revealed my character. Jesus was honored when I lived life His way at work.

If you haven't made Jesus your boss in all areas of your life, I recommend you start today in one area at a time. I wish I could walk through this adventure with you and rejoice at the changes. I know it's not easy (!) and it will take time, but it is so worth the effort. *Ready for the adventure so you'll be ready when Jesus returns?*

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 24:45-51

*"faithful and wise servant" or "wicked servant"*

Today starts three parables that Jesus gives to encourage us to *Keep Watch* for His return: faithful and unfaithful servants, 10 virgins, and talents.

The main job of the servant who the master puts in charge is to oversee and feed the servants in his charge. He knew his master would be coming home soon and would expect the household to be running smoothly and the servants fed and well cared for. If you watched *Downton Abbey*, you have a picture of what this servant looks like.

So, who do these in-charge servants represent? I think the master in the parable is Jesus, and the overseeing servants represent those who are in leadership positions in His kingdom—pastors, elders, and anyone who feeds others with spiritual truth.

I was fortunate to spiritually grow up in a church environment where the pastors taught through a book of the Bible from beginning to end, and we had our Bibles open so we could see where the truth they were describing was coming from. We were taught how to feed ourselves on truth, so we weren't totally dependent on someone else's opinions. We were encouraged to share with each other what we were learning and how it affected us.

My heart breaks when I meet believers who don't know all of Scripture but only depend on a verse or two. They seem to flounder when hard times come and all they know are platitudes. They haven't learned how to feed themselves spiritually, and they don't look forward to Jesus' returning.

Their situation is why I started writing these devotionals working through the New Testament. I wanted to provide new and/or ungrounded believers with a tool where they could work through the truth God has given us and learn what He wants us to know.

I'm not saying at all that the pastors of the churches these men and women have attended are evil or want to lead their listeners astray. They may have a purpose for how they teach and hopefully are encouraging their listeners to get involved in Bible classes that teach systematically.

What Jesus is saying here is that if a pastor or church leader doesn't really believe that Jesus is returning and that all will be held accountable for what we've said and done, then he or she will be leading those he or she is responsible for down a dangerous path for all of them.

*Is the teaching you hear getting you ready for Jesus' return? If not, it's time to get yourself ready so you're keeping watch for that time.*

(If you want to know more about the end times, you may want to check out the *Left Behind* notes on our website [www.WalksWithTheFather.com](http://www.WalksWithTheFather.com).)

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 25:1-13

*"And the door was shut."*

Wise and foolish, oil for lamps, bridegroom but no bride; what is this parable about? The first parable having to do with Jesus' return to earth was directed toward those who are responsible for caring for and feeding those who follow Jesus. Today's parable is about those who are waiting for the Lord's return as the 10 virgins, or young women, who are waiting for the bridegroom.

In that time and culture, the bridegroom took the main stage (wonder when the switch happened for the bride to be the center of attention?). He paid for the wedding and even for the wedding clothes for the guests. He goes to get his bride from her home and walks her to the ceremony. Friends join them along the way as they've been waiting for the procession, and weddings were held at night so the guests would need lamps to light their way.

So, what do the details of the parable represent?

- Bridegroom – This one is easy, right? The bridegroom represents Jesus who comes for His bride, the church.
- 10 Virgins – These potential wedding guests represent followers of Jesus from when Jesus was resurrected until He returns at the end of the age.
- Oil in lamps – Ah, this is what makes the difference in the outcome for the virgins. While all the women start out with enough oil, only half of the group knows that they need to keep a fresh supply of oil around so they're ready for whatever happens. What provides us with what we need? The Holy Spirit, who is represented by oil in the Old Testament.

All of the virgins started out with enough knowledge of the Holy Spirit to look like they belonged in the group, but only five of them kept going back to the source of their light so they'd be ready for whatever happens.

It's not enough to know the truth of Jesus' death and resurrection and the coming of the Spirit. We can know truth and doctrine, but if we don't have an ongoing relationship with Jesus and depend on His power through the Spirit (so we can die to ourselves and the chains of our past so we can live the life He died to give us), we're like the 5 foolish virgins. And this isn't a one-time choice, even though it requires an initial choice. It's a daily choice that we make until the day we die, or He returns. The wise virgins found an open door to the wedding banquet, but the foolish virgins found that the door was shut.

*What choices are you making today? Is the door to the final wedding banquet staying open or starting to close?*

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 25:14-30

*"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"*

Today we have Jesus' third parable about watching and waiting. The story line is straightforward, but the real question is, what is a talent? Most believe Jesus isn't referring to money, even though a talent was a coin that was worth more than \$1000, a lot of money in those days!

We tend to think of talents are something we're born with, like the ability to learn foreign languages, good hand-eye coordination, or an ability to sing well.

Instead, in this parable, a talent is the property of the master that he entrusts to men working for him. With Jesus using the word "entrusted," He shows how important this property is to the master.

So, the master has something that is very dear to him, but its value will multiply as it is used by his servants without the master using it himself. Then why is Jesus telling this parable?

Commentators suggest that these talents are opportunities that God makes available to us, and we have to decide whether to accept an opportunity as it comes to us and run with it for the sake of the kingdom, or ignore it and bury the opportunity in the ground, so to speak.

On the day I was researching these parables and read about the opportunities that God provides and that aren't based on our born-with abilities, I asked the Father if He had an opportunity that He wanted me to take on. About two hours later I was at the Korean preschool where I've gone this year to read to the two- and three-year-olds. The owner said she had an "opportunity" for me for the summer. Yes, she used that word. The timing wasn't coincidental. I struggled with what they wanted because the opportunity was out of my comfort zone and training, but I knew I had to accept it from the Father.

So, this summer I've been working with four-year-olds whose parents want them to go to an English-speaking pre-K. I don't know how the kingdom is being furthered since the owner and teachers are all Christians, but I'm choosing to be faithful and am having such fun with the children.

*What opportunity is the Father wanting to entrust with you today?*

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 25:31-46

*"Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."*

When I was in grad school working on a degree in English literature, I had to take an American literature course and write a major paper based on a topic of my choice. Some students loved this challenge, not me. I didn't even like the authors we were studying. The topic I eventually chose had to do with a reference that Matthew Arnold made in his 1867 sonnet "The Good Shepherd with the Kid" about separating sheep from the goats in this section. I know I passed the course, but I had no idea what this section of Matthew was about and why Matthew Arnold referred to it. I wrote all around the subject but never nailed it.

This "failure" on my part has haunted me over the years, and I've wanted to understand what Jesus was talking about. My philosophy has been that if I didn't understand something in scripture, eventually God would open my eyes to the truth. Now it's happened! I've been reading Ray C. Stedman's book, *What on Earth Is Happening?* that covers Matthew 24-25, and his insights were amazing.

Jesus describes four people (or groups of people): the Son of Man who is the King with all of His angels, the sheep, the goats, and the King's "brothers of mine." What differentiates the sheep from the goats is how the nations treated the King's brethren.

Here's what I think is happening. The previous parables have talked about Jesus returning in the form of a master and as a bridegroom, and people are being evaluated based on how faithful and wise they have been. Scripture refers to a time when Jesus returns and takes His followers with Him (the rapture), and the end times begin. Because of the rapture, 144,000 Jews become followers of Jesus (Revelation 7 and 14) and start to evangelize the nations, the Gentiles. These Jews are hated, sought out, and persecuted because of their new faith.

The Gentiles who have become followers of Jesus during this time have a choice: do they stay safe, or do they help out their Jewish brethren whenever they can? I think we see the result in today's words. Those who loved Jesus and took care of those He loved even though they looked like needy strangers inherited the kingdom of God. Those who ignored the needy strangers who were hungry, thirsty, without clothes, sick, and/or in prison, and chose to remain as safe as they could during the tribulation, will experience eternal punishment.

While Jesus' words could apply to how we care for the poor now, I think Jesus' challenge to help those who are being opposed for their faith is all too real. *I want to be with the sheep, how about you?*

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 26:1-5

" . . . and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him."

What interesting words: *plotted* and *sly* in this version, *schemed* and *secretly* in the NIV, *plotted* and *seize by stealth* in the New American Standard Bible, *consulted* and *subtily* in the King James Version, and *conspiring* and *stealth* in The Message.

They must have known that what they were trying to do was wrong. I doubt if these religious leaders had any idea that Jesus already knew what was going to take place in just two days.

I'm watching a series on public broadcasting channel called Poldark about a man in Cornwall in the late 1700s. He was on trial for his life because another man wanted his property. This other man schemed and connived behind the scenes and paid for lies to be said during the trial. Poldark's lawyer told him the only way to save his life was to admit to the charges, agree to the lies, and beg for mercy. But Poldark was a man of honor and highly respected by those who wanted to also live honorably. He knew he couldn't live with himself if he gave into the pressure. The judge wanted him to be found guilty, but the jury found him not guilty.

How do you make your plans? Do you make them out in the open where others of good character can push back or applaud? Or do you plot and scheme in ways that will get others in trouble?

While I don't think I plot or scheme, my tendency is to make my plans on my own and not involve others in my thinking. One of my biggest challenges in life is to let others know what I'm thinking about before making a decision, especially my husband.

You probably aren't as deceitful as the religious leaders were toward Jesus or the man who wanted Poldark dead, but are you as open as you could be? Having men and women in our lives who can help us process how we make decisions, men and women of high moral character who won't bend in a storm are essential for standing firm. Poldark is a fictional character so can stand by himself, but we're encouraged by others who are like-minded, who have lived in the past or who are living now. If we continually allow ourselves to be challenged by how others face challenges, we'll more than likely be able to stand firm when we need to.

Who is encouraging and challenging you?

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 26:6-13

*"I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."*

Matthew, Mark, and John all talk about a woman who anoints Jesus for burial, but Matthew and Mark seem to be referring to a different woman who anoints Jesus' head, while John describes Mary (of Mary and Martha) who anoints Jesus' feet. In any case, the main point is that all three disciples describe women who probably spent their dowry because they cared more about honoring Jesus than they cared about protecting their future. Could we say the same?

But there are some other facts in this short section that I think are worth looking at:

- In the days just before His death, Jesus took a break to spend time with dear friends rather than worry about his own future.
- One friend was Simon the leper who Jesus had healed. Simon honored Jesus by hosting a dinner for Him and His disciples. Perhaps this group of men were staying at Simon's home during this week.
- Jesus stood up for the woman when the disciples challenged what she was doing with her money. Even having a woman in their midst was a challenge to their rules. And the woman was more comfortable serving Jesus than she was challenged by the men's accusations.

What do we learn from this dinner party?

1. When facing a horrible situation up to and including death, do we reach out to others for fellowship and encouragement, or do we only care about ourselves?
2. Do we serve out of the love and life Jesus has provided, or do we keep what we have for ourselves?
3. Do we protect the defenseless women and children, or do we browbeat them with what we think is important?
4. Does our hope for the future depend on possessions that we've stored up, or is our hope and confidence in Jesus?

Phew, all this in just seven verses. Matthew packed in so much truth to challenge us in just a few words. Which challenge do you need today?

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 26:14-16

*"From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him [Jesus] over."*

What propels someone to betray another person? In the news these days many people are leaking sensitive political secrets to the media. Are their motives at all similar to Judas'? We've had whistleblowers in the VA who have told us about problems in that agency that is supposed to serve our veterans. What's the difference between leakers and whistleblowers?

Could a case be made that Judas betrayed Jesus for what he thought were altruistic reasons? I would say "no" because he wanted payment for his actions, and then he "watched for an opportunity."

The chief priests and elders were probably ecstatic that they didn't really have to come up with a plan to kill Jesus---they just had to be ready to follow through on a case handed to them. Now they had two days to get their ducks in order, so to speak. They had time to get their "legal" arguments prepared and their paid-for witnesses rehearsed.

So, what was going through Judas' mind during these two days? From Matthew's, Mark's, and Luke's accounts, the last straw for Judas seems to be the woman's "wasting" the perfume on Jesus. Judas handled the money for the disciples, so he not only knew the value of the perfume, but he also knew that the money from its sale wouldn't be going through his hands. Maybe all of the profit could be given to the poor, but maybe Judas wanted to keep some for himself. And we know that the love of money is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10). Luke tells us in Luke 22 that Satan entered Judas to set this all in motion; Satan was able to tempt Judas in his area of weakness---love of money instead of love of Jesus. But did Judas know what he was setting in motion? We'll look at this question in a few days.

But what about us? Do we have an area of weakness that the enemy can exploit? We have no idea what the ramifications of giving in to this temptation can bring.

Have you owned up to your areas of weakness? I need to look at mine again. The solution is to identify them and then bring Jesus into our heart, thinking about Him and loving Him instead of our own desires.

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 26:17-30

*"The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."*

Have you ever been betrayed? Any husband or wife whose spouse has had an affair or who has given into an addiction or lust knows firsthand what betrayal feels like. Co-workers can feel the depth of betrayal if a colleague turns his or her back on them and helps a competitor. Betrayal of a trust cuts deep and hurts.

Jesus knows that He is going to be betrayed on the last night of His life by one of His close friends because He knew the prophecies in the scripture that He grew up with. In today's section, Jesus reveals what is going to happen and lets the traitor know that He knows.

How do we respond to being betrayed? Usually with anger, hurt, depression, or self-loathing. Somehow, we think that what another does defines our worth as a person. If someone betrays us, we can so easily think that we're not worth being respected and then have a hard time trusting anyone else.

But Jesus (oh those wonderful words) reacted differently, and I think His example is what we need to learn from. Jesus knew human nature and the corruption that sin produces. Jesus knew that what Judas did was a reflection of Judas' heart, not Jesus' worth. Jesus knew that "woe," or great sorrow or distress, would come to him and he would have been better off if he had never been born.

So how should we respond if we're betrayed by someone close to us, especially if the betrayal is because of our walk with the Father? After the initial pain, I think we're to remember the betrayal that Jesus endured that led to His death for us. Then we're to remember that the betrayer's actions say more about him or her than it says about us. Then we're to remember that those who betray will suffer sorrow and distress on down the line and perhaps be betrayed him/herself.

Our worth and value comes from Him who sacrificed Himself for our behalf. We were worth it to Jesus for Him to be betrayed and go to the cross so we could share in His resurrection life.

Hopefully today will help you have a redeemed look at a painful time in your life, because if we haven't been betrayed yet, we probably will at some point since we share in the sufferings of Christ as we walk with Him.

Ready to look forward with Him instead of being held back by the past?

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 26:31-35

"I will never . . . "

Have you ever heard yourself saying, "I will never \_\_\_\_\_! (Fill in the blank.) My problem is that I've not set standards for myself and so ended up doing behaviors I wasn't proud of. Either way, the result is the same.

We can just hear Peter and the other disciples pumping themselves up with what they would never do, but we can also feel what they felt when they ran away out of fear. Jesus knew what would happen and didn't say a word.

When I was in grad school, I had the choice of writing one large paper or three smaller ones; I chose the second option since I wasn't planning on going on for a Ph.D.

One of the possible books I chose to write on was *Aaron's Rod* that D. H. Lawrence wrote in 1922. While I don't remember the story line or how it fits in with Moses' brother Aaron and his rod (staff) that budded, I still remember the theme that I saw in the book and wrote about: a virtue isn't a virtue until a person has been tempted in this area of life and hasn't given in. In other words, I can't say that I'm an honest person until I've been overwhelmingly tempted to lie or cheat and don't give into the temptation.

I think this is what happened to Peter and the other disciples. They talked a good game until faced with reality, and then they folded.

The hope that comes with this section is Jesus. He knew what they were going to do and what He was going to offer them in response---forgiveness and grace. Jesus knew they would fold under the intense pressure, but He also knew that His resurrection life that was going to be available after the cross and the grave was going to make them into new men who could withstand anything. All they were going to have to do was own up to their failure, accept Jesus' forgiveness, and begin living resurrected lives when the Spirit took up residence in their hearts.

We know what happened to Peter throughout the book of Acts and the letters he wrote to the churches, but what's happening to you and me today? Are we making bravado statements of virtue and strength that haven't been tested, or do we seeing failure and don't know what to do about it? Peter's example is our beacon of hope, isn't it?

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 26:36-46

*"Then [Jesus] said to [Peter, James, and John], 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.'"*

Whenever I've read this section in the past, I had kept on reading through the arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. But today, while concentrating on Jesus' struggle in Gethsemane, I was overwhelmed by the emotional pain in His words. Rarely has He shared such depth of pain with us. When John the Baptist was killed, we saw Him spend a night on the mountain with His Father (Matthew 14), but He didn't share His grief with His disciples.

Today we see Jesus approach grief and pain in a different way, perhaps a way we can learn from.

1. Jesus goes to a familiar place (John 18:2) that's outside. Its name means "oil press" because of the olive trees. He is being "pressed" by overwhelming sorrow just like olives are pressed by heavy grind stones.
2. Jesus asks His three closest friends to go with Him, leaving the other disciples close by.
3. Jesus puts into words the sorrow He is feeling because of what is to come next and asks these close friends to keep watch as He moves away to spend time with His Father.
4. Jesus humbles Himself before His Father and asks for a change of plans if possible. He doesn't tell His Father what is going on or how He's feeling, probably because He knows that His Father already knows this. While Jesus wants the plan to change, He's committed to God's will being fulfilled.
5. Jesus returns to his friends and finds them sleeping (it is night and it's dark). Jesus verbalizes His hurt at their not taking his sorrow seriously and lets them know that He's struggling. The second time He goes away to pray and returns to them, at least they were trying to stay awake. The third time He goes to pray and returns, He comes back resolved, "knowing the hour is near, "and wakes them up because His betrayer is coming.

Such lessons from Jesus' example of dealing with sorrow: being honest with close friends, going to the Father over and over requesting a different outcome but committed to doing God's will, and praying until being resolved to what God wants---regardless. Or are you a friend who has been asked to pray? Do you fall asleep, or stay alert?

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 26:47-56

*"Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?"*

Only Matthew tells us of these words by Jesus. The other gospel writers describe the sword and the ear, and Luke tells us that Jesus touches the man's ear and heals him. But Matthew tells us about the exchange between Jesus and the man with the sword (and John tells us the man is Peter, while others refer to the man as a companion or servant).

Regardless of who yields the sword, I was struck with Jesus' concern for his friend to let him know that all was under control.

In Jesus' days, a legion of Roman soldiers was at least 6000 soldiers, so "more than twelve legions of angels" would have been a minimum of 72,000 angels. If we lined up 72,000 soldiers against the small group of men who came to arrest Jesus, obviously the angels would prevail. What do you think the might of 72,000 powerful angels would look like? In Isaiah 37:36, Isaiah tells us that a single angel easily handled 185,000 men in one night.

So, what was Jesus saying to the man with the sword? I think He's telling this companion, just like He's telling us, that Jesus doesn't need our help or our strength to battle His opponents. Jesus knows what is to come and how the Father will handle it. What seems to be the worst that can happen is part of God's plan, and He is in complete control. We just have to choose to believe and wait for Him to work out His plans.

What are you facing today? Does it seem that forces are coming for you and that all is dark? Jesus knows what you're facing because He faced it too, walked through the circumstances that kept getting worse and worse to the point of death. He persevered, and the outcome was His resurrection that proved that our sins are forgiven. Jesus tells us that when He returns, all will be made right.

The next time we're faced with an insurmountable situation (perhaps today?), let's remember that twelve legions are ready to battle on our behalf. Jesus trusted His Father, and so can we.

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 26:57-68

*"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you . . . ."*

The question that went through my mind as I read today's section is: "Who is really in charge?" Here's what we have:

- The mob sent by the chief priests and elders
- The high priest, Caiaphas, the teachers of the law, and the elders who have stayed up late and were ready to question Jesus
- Two false witnesses (out of many) who claimed that Jesus had blasphemed

Then we have Jesus. He goes along with the mob, stands quietly before His accusers, and then finally answers the question about His real identity---the Christ (Messiah). But---that wonderful word when Jesus utters it---Jesus confirms His identity and His return to earth. He tells them that He'll be with God Almighty when He comes to earth at the end of the age.

The high priests can't accept this proclamation unless they want to admit that Jesus is their Messiah. Their true natures come out as they "spit him in the face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him" and ridiculed Him. While these Jewish leaders could convict Him of blasphemy, they couldn't sentence Him to death since they were under Roman rule. All this scheming would be for nothing if they couldn't convince Pilate to execute Jesus.

And Jesus stands there and takes their wrath because He knows that in a few hours He'll be taking on all of His Father's wrath against sin.

What I think is sad about this exchange is that these Jewish leaders didn't see what they were doing after Jesus died for them and was raised from the dead. They kept persecuting Jesus' followers. But---that wonderful word---one came out of their influence who did see Jesus as the Messiah, the apostle Paul.

So, we have some choices here: do we rail against Jesus and refuse the gift of life and love He offers us, *or* do we give in, own up to who we are without Him, turn around 180 degrees, and walk with Him in newness of life? What is your choice today?

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 26:69-75

*"And he went outside and wept bitterly."*

What an insight into Peter that we're getting with today's section. We've seen him as the burly fisherman that Jesus chose as His first disciple. We've seen him as a family man, and we've seen him as a self-proclaimed leader who wants to tell Jesus what to do. In the last section we saw him brave enough to follow Jesus after He was arrested. Then Peter saw Jesus falsely accused; convicted by the religious leaders; and then spit at, struck with fists, and slapped. I think Peter's conviction turned to bravado and then to fear for himself. If they could do this to Jesus, Peter realized that he wasn't safe either.

So, when Peter was challenged by three different people or groups of people, he caved and denied that he knew Jesus, going so far as to curse them and himself as if somehow this would make his protesting their accusations more credible. Can you identify with Peter? I can.

At just the right time, a rooster crowed, and Peter remembered Jesus' words to him just a few days before that he would deny Jesus three times before a cock crowed. He realized that Jesus knew He would be arrested; knew Peter would follow, knew Peter would hear and see what was happening to Him, and that Peter would give into fear to protect himself. If Jesus knew all of this ahead of time, then circumstances weren't out of control, and Jesus' words could be trusted. Peter saw his own failures to trust Jesus and was overwhelmed by them.

Luckily for us, we know the end of Peter's story that we'll be looking at on the other side of the resurrection, but today we're left with Peter's grief.

This grief is familiar to you if you've already decided to follow Jesus, because we've all been in Peter's place. But if not, then grief doesn't have to be the end of your story. Stick with me as we keep on seeing the rest of the story from Matthew's perspective.

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21 -28

## Matthew 27:1-10

*"Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled . . . ."*

Judas finally saw himself as he really was. All along he had had an agenda, especially regarding the money given to Jesus to live on and had never had his intentions revealed. He probably thought that he was safe from detection and became emboldened to control circumstances. I wonder what his motive was in betraying Jesus since it was clearly not to condemn Him to death. Perhaps Judas thought that if Jesus was arrested and put in prison, the band of twelve would break up, and he could keep the money that had been given to them, as well as earn 30 more pieces of silver from the religious leaders. His scheming had been done in secret; he thought he was safe and rich (ah, the love of money).

But the religious leaders wanted Jesus dead, and Judas knew he was responsible. He tried to give the money back, but the religious leaders laughed at him.

I wish Judas would have known about Zechariah's prophecy in Zechariah 11:12. Matthew either knew of it or it was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit after Jesus' resurrection. Jesus would have known about Jeremiah's words, and I think would have offered forgiveness to Judas.

Judas shows us why suicide is so sad. The person lacks hope because he or she doesn't know or accept the truth about Jesus and His love, acceptance, forgiveness, and power.

Are you struggling with dark thoughts today, or do you know someone who is? Instead of weeping bitterly or looking for a way to stop the pain, we should look up. Look up at the cross, look up at the empty tomb, look up to the heavens where Jesus ascended, and look up and see Jesus' face. The enemy says we have no hope, but Jesus says He is our hope. Who do we listen to in these dark days?

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 27:11-26

"Meanwhile . . . "

I don't think I've seen the word "meanwhile" in Matthew's account before. What it says to me is that this time period is being described by multiple points of view. What a reminder that when we're going through a hard time (or a good time), others are going through their own pressures and stresses. In today's section, we have Jesus; Pilate, the governor of Israel; the Jewish religious leaders; the crowd being controlled by the religious leaders; Barabbas, a notorious prisoner; and Pilate's wife, who had had a dream (Matthew 27:19). Let's look at each of the players.

Jesus – answers Pilate's question about His identity but doesn't respond to charges made by religious leaders because He understood the motives behind the charges

Pilate – doesn't want to convict Jesus but doesn't want to accept responsibility for releasing Him either

religious leaders – their envy of Jesus overcomes their logic

the crowd – easily riled up by their religious leaders and not influenced by logic or truth

Barabbas – a Jewish zealot who had been convicted of murder

Pilate's wife – this woman had the facts of the case confirmed to her through a dream that had really unsettled her; her husband chose the uproar of the crowd over reason and his wife's input. An Apocryphal book, *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, identifies her as Claudia Procula and a granddaughter of the Emperor Augustus. Legend says she may have been the Claudia mentioned by Paul in 2 Timothy 4:21 ([www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)).

So, who do we want to be like?

Pilate, who knows truth but was swayed by the threats of the crowd and wouldn't stand up for what he knew was right.

The religious leaders, who have let envy (or other emotions) control them.

The crowd, that is easily manipulated by unfounded accusations.

Barabbas, probably a relieved man. I wonder if we'll see him in heaven because he was given a second chance at life by an innocent man.

Pilate's wife, whose heart was sensitive to God so that truth was revealed to her, regardless of the circumstances in which she was living. How like God to choose an unknown person to reveal truth to. Her character is quite a testimony to us.

Who are you going to choose to be like today?

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 27:27-31

*"My kingdom is not of this world."*

As I read and reread today's section, the thought that kept going through my mind was that the soldiers were going through the motions of honoring a king but were mocking Jesus' claim to be the king of the Jews because they believed they were in charge based on Pilate's status as governor.

But no verse popped out as one to write about as I sat with pen in hand, so I read through the other Gospel accounts of this time period: Mark 15, Luke 23, and John 18-19. Luke and John gave the fullest accounts of Jesus' time with Pilate, and then I saw Jesus' words that His kingdom is not of this world (today's verse), and the contrast between the kingdom of this world and Jesus' kingdom became clear.

Kings and other leaders in this world are chosen by men (and women today) and can be "unchosen." They take and hold their authority by strength and always have soldiers to back them up. They take advantage of the perks of office (clothes, food, own transportation, etc.) and don't pay a cent for what they use. Family and friends are hangers-on and tell them what they want to hear.

Jesus as king in His kingdom is totally different. He earned His position by living a sinless life here on earth but dying for *our* sins so we could live with Him forever. No military force is needed to keep Him in place because God Himself backs up Jesus' authority. Jesus lives as we do and provides us with all we need. He welcomes all of us as brothers and sisters and wants open and honest relationships with us.

Which kingdom sounds good to you? Me too. We have to live here on earth for now with the demands of this world, but we can also live in the kingdom of God while we're here. Jesus' words and commands can be our standard of living, and we can count on Him to provide what we need while we're here.

The world needs more followers of Jesus who live according to His kingdom. What difference will this truth make for you today?

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 27:32-44

*"There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it."*

My first reading of this section exhausted me because so much happened with so many different groups of people. During my second reading I started noticing the order of events, and I was surprised to see Jesus being offered the wine mixture before He was crucified---I always thought it was during His death process on the cross.

So, I looked at the different Gospel accounts: Matthew and Mark documented one offer of wine before the crucifixion, while Luke and John had the offer when Jesus was on the cross. Before the cross, Jesus refused the offer, while on the cross He accepted it.

With these differences in mind, I started looking at some internet sites for possible answers. Here's what I found.

Refused wine – this wine was mixed with gall or myrrh. The taste would have been bitter and perhaps poisonous. If Jesus had accepted this wine, He would have died from poisoning rather than fully accepting to take on the sins of the world.

Accepted wine – this wine in verse 35 of this section and Luke and John was a sour wine tasting more like vinegar that would be more refreshing than water. This wine would have helped Jesus stay alive longer so He could finish what He set out to do. (Information taken from an article by David Mathis, ED of [www.desiring God.org](http://www.desiring God.org).)

Jesus' act of refusing the wine in this section but accepting it in the next section was for our benefit. He refused to short circuit His death; He didn't look for a way out. He stayed the course.

Is this what we do when we are presented with a hard time? Usually I think we look for a way out or a way around. Jesus "walked through the valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23), and He'll walk through with us whatever He allows to come our way. His outcome was worth it, and ours will be too.

Ready to walk through instead of around, over, or under?

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 27:45-56

*"At that moment [when Jesus gave up His spirit and died on the cross], the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people."*

I've been stumped by this section for quite a while because I have never heard anyone teach on the effect that these three events had on those in Jerusalem. I know the writer of Hebrews tells us that the torn curtain allows us all to enter the most Holy Place in the temple (Hebrews 10:19), but how did the torn curtain affect the religious leaders? The veil was 60' long, 30' wide, and 4" thick; it took 300 priests to manipulate it. Only God was strong enough to have torn it.

The earthquake opened up the tombs of many holy people who were then raised to life. They went into the city and appeared to many people. Not everyone was raised to life, just "many holy people." Who were they (certainly John the Baptist and Joseph, Jesus' earthly father, were included), and how did their appearance after Jesus' resurrection affect those they were visiting? What did these holy people do between Jesus' death and resurrection? The centurions and Romans soldiers in front of the place where Jesus had been laid were affected, but what did they do with this information?

In comparison to the miracle of Jesus' resurrection, these events aren't that important, but they did happen, and Matthew thought they were important enough that he wanted to tell us about them (Mark and Luke also tell us about the curtain being torn in half).

What's kept me wondering about the significance of these events is the knowledge that when God acts, it's for a purpose, even if we can't see the reason right away. He works behind the scenes for His purposes. Tomorrow I'll write about what I think He was doing.

For today, though, is something going on in your life or in your world that is throwing you for a loop? Perhaps the truth that God *is* working behind the scenes for His purposes, and His purposes *are* for the good of those who love (and so trust) Him (Romans 8:28). Perhaps this truth is just what you need to hold on to. I know it's what I need today!

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 27:57-61

*"Going to Pilate, [Joseph of Arimathea] asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him."*

"For such a time as this." Mordecai's words to his cousin, Esther, reminded her that God had placed her in a position where only she could save her people if she were to be brave and trust God. (Esther 4)

God was working behind the scenes in the lives of Joseph of Arimathea and Pilate for the burial of Jesus.

Such bravery was required of Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph had no idea of how he could serve Jesus. He was a rich man who didn't allow his wealth to get in the way of following Jesus. For all he knew, Pilate would have him crucified as well for being associated with Jesus. But he went ahead and gave up his prized final resting place in honor of his Lord. For all he knew, Jesus' bones would rest forever in this tomb, and Joseph would have to find a new place for himself and his family to be buried.

Joseph was willing to touch a dead person and so became ceremonially unclean for a period of time. He, and probably some of his servants, would have taken Jesus from the cross, clean Him as fast as they could since sunset was coming quickly, wrapped Jesus in a clean linen cloth (another expense), and secured Jesus in the new tomb by rolling a big stone in front of the entrance. Joseph probably then went home and mourned Jesus' death, not knowing the end of the story.

Bravery was also required of Pilate. He probably should have refused Joseph's request since Jesus had died as a criminal, but Pilate had never wanted to crucify Jesus. Pilate gave Him every opportunity to save Himself, but Jesus knew what had to happen. Even Pilate's wife begged him to spare Jesus because of a dream that had terrified her. But Pilate gave into the Jewish religious leaders and the crowd that had been stirred up. Pilate didn't do what was right at the time, and it weighed heavily on him.

So, when Joseph came and requested Jesus' body, Pilate stood up to his fears and the pressure of others, and did what was right.

I bet we all have "a time such as this" like Esther, Joseph, and Pilate. The question is, will we be brave and trust God for our futures?

What will your answer be?

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 27:62-66

*"Sir, [the chief priests and the Pharisees] said [to Pilate], we remember that while he was still alive, that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead."*

A year before I became a Christian, I ran across a book with the main premise that the disciples stole Jesus' body from the tomb before the soldiers came to protect the opening. The author claimed that Jesus had just fainted on the cross from all the pain, and the disciples were able to revive Him and quickly nurse Him back to health. This revived Jesus is the one who appeared to the disciples. However, I don't remember what the author said about what happened to this Jesus after he supposedly ascended into heaven.

As a biblically ignorant person, I was impressed by the reasoning. While God was wooing me that year, I kept thinking back to this book and wondering what was true. Even after I accepted God's invitation to know Him through His Son, my mind would wander back to what I had read. Finally, I had to confront the suppositions in the book and answer them with scripture. Of course, scripture and history and changed lives won out.

Today as I read this section, I was struck by the conflict in the chief priests' and Pharisees' words. While they accused Jesus of being a deceiver, they also so believed His words about rising on the third day that they wanted guards to be posted until that time was past. If Jesus were truly a deceiver, why would they think that a man crucified on a cross and pronounced as officially dead could come back to life? They may have convinced Pilate, but he was easily convinced.

I can see now that our Enemy tried to deceive me through a book (and my so-called intellect) just as he worked through the chief priests and Pharisees to deceive Pilate and future generations through a story that wouldn't hold up when scrutinized through the filter of facts.

Is the Enemy trying to deceive you in any way today? He may sound like he knows what he's talking about, but his ways lead to death and destruction. We can choose to believe lies that accuse others or believe Jesus and truly live.

What are you going to choose today?

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 28:1-10

*"There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it."*

Have you ever lived through a significant earthquake? I lived in Northern California for thirty years, and we were always on edge waiting for one to hit. The worst one for me was in the late 1980s while we were at our youngest son's soccer game. We felt safe on the open field, but the huge trees around us were waving back and forth, and the sound from the trees was like locomotives passing close by us. The only damage we had at home was a broken bottle of vinegar in the kitchen, but others weren't so lucky. Earthquakes affect a lot of people because so much land moves at one time.

But in today's section, the "violent earthquake" only affected one small spot of land---the tomb where Jesus had been placed.

*I think it's interesting* that the Gospel writers don't say that Jesus walked out of the tomb when the angel rolled the stone away. He had already left the confines of the tomb---it couldn't hold Him.

*I also think it's interesting* that Jesus didn't reveal Himself to the soldiers, only to the women and eventually to the disciples and His other followers.

The earthquake we experienced rocked our world where we stood, and its multiple aftershocks, were sometimes as bad as the initial earthquake. I wonder if the soldiers even felt it as the stone was moved? They seemed to be more afraid of the angel, and they were hardened Roman soldiers who inspired fear themselves. No words seemed to be spoken by either the angel or the guards.

But with the women, the angel gave them such wonderful news and told them what to do next. When Jesus met them, He told them not to live with their fear but rather to tell others that He wanted to meet them in Galilee.

Have you ever thought about the fears you live with, the fears that keep you from walking out in faith, the fears of what others may think, or the fear that you're not worthy of being loved? I think fear stops us from what God wants for us; I know it stops me when I let it take over.

Christmas is a week away for me as I'm writing this section. What a great time to look fully at Jesus and not let fear creep in. What about you? Are you looking at what you fear or at Jesus?

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 28:11-15

*"And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day."*

If I were to give a title to today's section, I think it would be *Who Are You Afraid Of?*

The guards had seen a heavenly being in all its glory and power and had been "so afraid that they shook and became like dead men." Maybe when the guards saw that the women hadn't been hurt when the angel spoke to them, they figured they were safe so left to report in.

I wonder what happened to these Roman soldiers after Jesus' resurrection became big news. Did they stick to their story, even in their own hearts? Did they enjoy spending their extra pay, or did this money feel dirty to them? What did the "other" soldiers do?

It's so easy to think that if we just see a miracle, we will believe. But the guards show us that just seeing a miracle isn't enough. We must connect with the One who did the miracle.

But getting back to today's verse: the lie created, circulated, and believed. Remember the section we covered a couple of days ago, Matthew 27:62-66, when I talked about the book I had read the year before deciding to follow Jesus? That book included today's lie. It's a 2000-year-old lie from the father of lies who wants to keep us from knowing our heavenly Father through His Son.

I wonder how many other lies are floating out there, keeping us from truth. I've found that it's all too easy to live in my circumstances, blame others, and not think deeply so I don't have to deal with myself and what I'm doing to myself and others.

Have some lies started surfacing in your mind? Please don't let them settle in and make a home in your heart. Too much is at stake.

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# Walking With the Father Through Matthew 21-28

## Matthew 28:16-20

*"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Have you noticed that after Jesus came out of the tomb, He wanted His disciples to meet Him in Galilee, way north of Jerusalem? Many of these men were from this area, and probably all were glad to leave the danger of Jerusalem. If the religious leaders wanted Jesus dead, the disciples probably thought they were next.

So, they met with Jesus for the last time and He gave them His final words. Luke tells us in Acts 1 that Jesus sends them back to Jerusalem and tells them to wait together until the Father sends them the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Go from safety and what's familiar back to the lion's den, so to speak? How could they have the courage to leave and go? How can we have the courage to leave safety and security to step out when Jesus says to move? That's the real question, isn't it?

I think the answer for them and for us is in today's words from Jesus that He is with us all the way to the end, not just of our lives, but also to the very end of time and space.

When I step out in faith instead of giving into fear, I usually feel like I'm all by myself and the outcome is unknown. What a difference it makes to know that when Jesus tells us to go, He's with us and has the outcome under His control.

Little did the disciples know that after Passover the Spirit would come into them and be the strength, joy, and courage they would need to be able to do what Jesus told them to do on the mountain. But Jesus knew this would happen, that through the Spirit, He would be in them as well as with them forever.

Do you have something in front of you that causes you to be fearful, so you do nothing? I think we all do. As we finish Matthew's perspective of Jesus' life here on earth, let's really hear Jesus' final words and let them drown out everything else that keeps us from following Him and loving others.

*"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

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